



B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Georgia Department of Human Resources • Division of Family and Children Services • Mark A. Washington, Assistant Commissioner
Two Peachtree Street, Suite 19-490 • Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 • 404-651-8409 • 404-657-5105

February 23, 2009

SOCIAL SERVICES MANUAL TRANSMITTAL NO. 2009-2

TO: County Departments of Family and Children's Services
DFCS Regional Directors
State Staff

FROM: Mark A. Washington, Assistant Commissioner
Division of Family and Children's Services *MAW*

RE: Child Protective Services (Chapter 2105) and Foster Care (Chapter 1007)
Family Team Meeting- NEW

Purpose

The purpose of this Social Services Manual Transmittal is to incorporate the Family Team Meeting process into policy.

Discussion

Family Team Meetings represent a process for engaging families, community members, foster parents, relative caregivers, friends, neighbors, other family support, and professionals in critical decisions related to the safety, permanency and well being of children. Weaving together the family's expertise and the knowledge of professionals produces a partnership that designs more effective and appropriate family plans and services; and offers the family a continuing network of support.

The overarching goals are to:


1. Prevent the placement/replacement of children in out of home care when they can remain safely in their homes;
2. Reduce the length of stay for children entering care; and
3. Reduce the number of placement disruptions for children in care.

With the goal of improving outcomes for Georgia's families and children, this policy highlights critical case junctures in which Family Team Meetings should be held to ensure family involvement in critical decisions regarding the safety, permanency and wellbeing of their children.

IMPLEMENTATION

This Manual Transmittal is a new release. The transmittal represents the new policy design and format for all Social Services Policy. The redesign of our current policy design and format will take several months. Some of the section numbers in the new design may be represented with an "X". The "X" will be replaced with the corresponding section number once the entire chapter and section is approved.

Questions should be directed to the Field Program Specialist in the region. Regional staff may direct questions to Angela Coulon at ancoulon@dhr.state.ga.us.

	<div style="text-align: center;"> Division of Family and Children Services Child Welfare Manual </div>	Chapter: 7 Section: Effective Date:
		Previous Policy #:

Family Team Meeting

POLICY NUMBER:

CODES

REQUIREMENT

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) will facilitate Family Team Meetings (FTM) with all families receiving child welfare services through in-home Family Preservation Services or Out-of-Home Care (foster care, relative care or safety resource).

DFCS will utilize the structured FTM as the decision making forum for the case.

DFCS will convene an FTM at critical case junctures during the life of a case, including:

1. During the assessment (investigative) phase prior to the initiation of a safety resource or safety plan.
2. Within 45 calendar days of a case identified for Family Preservation Services;
3. Within 3 to 9 days of a child entering out of home care;
4. Prior to the development or reassessment of the Family Plan;
5. Prior to changes in permanency plan/goals;
6. Prior to changes in placement;
7. Prior to court hearings;
8. Upon the requests from the family or other team members;
9. Significant or lack of progress;
10. Significant changes in the family;
11. Within six (6) months of a child in out of home care reaching their 18th birthday; and
12. Prior to case Closure.

DFCS FTMs will be facilitated by a trained FTM Coordinator/Designee. The assigned Case Manager should not facilitate the FTM.

PROCEDURE

The DFCS Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) will:

1. Make the referral for FTM within required timeframes, and utilizing the FTM referral form (see Reference section).
2. Engage the family in identifying a family team for participation in the FTM and to support the family throughout and after DFCS involvement. The family team identified during the FTM will need to be in place at the time of case closure.
 - a. Encourage the family to include their informal support network such as family members, friends, members of the family's community support system, faith based supports, etc.
 - b. Advocate with the family for the CASA, school, pediatrician, therapist, foster parents and service providers to be included in the FTM. These individuals play a significant role in the lives of the children and family and can provide vital information/support for the family.
3. Ensure that all critical decisions and plans are developed out of the FTM.
4. Provide a list of non-negotiable services or issues that must be addressed.

The DFCS FTM Facilitator/Designee will:

1. Engage the family in identifying a family team for participation in the FTM and to support the family throughout and after DFCS involvement. The family team identified during the FTM will need to be in place at the time of case closure.
 - a. Encourage the family to include their informal support network such as family members, friends, members of the family's community support system, faith based supports, etc
 - b. Advocate with the family for the CASA, school, pediatrician, therapist, foster parents and service providers to be included in the FTM. These individuals play a significant role in the lives of the children and family and can provide vital information/support for the family.
2. Coordinate the FTM by:
 - a. Obtaining pertinent information on the family, including allegations/concerns, safety concerns, sensitive issues, participants, purpose of the FTM, etc.
 - b. Conducting a preparation interview with the family (home or other location), and other members of the family team.
 - i. A preparation interview is required for every Family Team Meeting to ensure that the family understands what to expect including the purpose, process/stages and role in the FTM; as well as agree to what will be accomplished.
 - ii. Discuss safety concerns, including domestic violence issues.
 - iii. Discuss the potential sources of conflict.
 - iv. Discuss required legal and agency mandates as well as non-negotiables.
 - v. Discuss confidentiality and HIPAA policy and stipulations
 - vi. Other participants should be oriented on their roles in making a positive contribution.
 - c. Scheduling the FTM within timeframes required.
 - d. Ensure that the meeting location and date/time is convenient for the family.

3. Conduct the Family Team Meeting.
 - a. Utilize the structured FTM model and the Standards of Practice for DFCS FTMs.
 - b. Ensure families actively participate, are fully involved, and share in decision making process.
 - c. Ensure that FTM goals are achieved.
 - d. Ensure HIPAA and other confidentiality stipulations are followed.
4. Ensure that a copy of the FTM documentation is provided to all appropriate participants at the conclusion of the FTM.
5. Document the FTM in Georgia Shines:
 - a. Select the Family Plan Tab (Family Preservation or Foster Care Stage)
 - b. Select the Family Team Meeting Tab (3rd Level Tab)
 - c. Enter FTM information (meeting date, start time, location, participants, narrative, safety concerns requiring separate FTMs, etc.)

The DFCS Case Manager will make all required referrals for services and develop an action plan to follow up with needs identified at the FTM.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

FTM's are a core component of the family centered approach, which involves engaging families in identifying a team of family and community supports. This team comes together to develop and implement an individualized family plan which builds on the identified strengths of the family to address their needs. DFCS will utilize the FTM to support the group decision making process in developing and implementing a family plan that incorporates critical information/ideas from the family team to alleviate safety and risk factors. FTMs are utilized to gain understanding of a families strengths, needs and to identify their support system.

What is a Family Team Meeting?

A Family Team Meeting is a gathering of family members, friends, members of the family's community support system, faith based supports and professionals who join together to develop individualized plans to strengthen family capacity, to assure safety, stability and permanency and to build natural supports that will sustain the family over time. Family conferencing evolved from the way that families form their own natural helping system to meet needs and solve problems. The Family Team Meeting is often the forum in which the child and family team comes together to help the family craft, implement or change the individualized child and family plan.¹

FTMs represent both a philosophy and practice strategy for delivering child welfare services. A FTM is a facilitated, task oriented and structured meeting which utilizes the information and resources of the team members, both formal and informal, to either develop a formal family plan, or make a formal decision regarding safety, permanency and wellbeing.

A FTM fully engages the families' in the planning process, jointly develops specific plans to address safety and risk of children, designs services and identify

¹ The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, "Family Team Conferencing"

supports for families. The FTM must also be a safe environment for both parents. In cases of domestic violence the SSCM must address safety issues for the victim parent (see Practice Guidance Domestic Violence Cases).

The purpose of the FTM is to develop formal plans with families, address safety factors, establish permanency plans, and promote families' self sufficiency and the wellbeing of their children.

Family Team Members

The family team includes the primary family (parent/caretakers), children/youth (as appropriate), other family members (extended family), foster parents, relative caregivers, neighbors, friends, and religious or faith based/spiritual leaders/supports; as well as professionals from formal systems such as OFI, schools, mental health, CASA, substance abuse treatment, and other service providers. Children are engaged in the FTM, upon consultation and approval from the parents. When considering including children in the FTM the SSCM must consider the child's chronological age, developmental level and emotional stability. Parents/Caretakers, and children (as age appropriate) must be engaged as active participants in FTMs and in identifying strengths and needs, and in the decision making regarding services and supports available to assist them.

Father Involvement and FTMs

Parents include the biological or adoptive mother and father. Both parents should be included in the development of the family plan and other decision making regarding the safety, permanency and well being of their children. It is therefore necessary to ensure that fathers are engaged in the planning process and participate in FTMs. This includes alleged or putative fathers. If the primary parent is the mother and she objects to including of the putative father in the FTM, the SSCM should engage the mother around the purpose of the FTM and outline the benefits of the father's participation in achieving safety and permanency goals; or in providing support. DFCS recognizes the father's right to be part of the FTM and will work to ensure that both parents are included in the FTM and are equal participants in developing a plan to ensure the safety, permanency and well being of their children.

Note: For situations where the custodial parent refuses to agree to the noncustodial parent's participation in the FTM; the FTM documentation must reflect the specific safety concerns which would necessitate having separate FTMs. Examples of safety concerns includes but is not limited to protective orders (child or parent), court ordered no contact with children, or other assessed safety concerns.

For cases involving Domestic Violence and Orders of Protection, see Practice Guidance regarding Domestic Violence Cases)

Independent Living Services

For youth eligible or involved in Independent Living Services, the ILP Coordinator should be included in the Family Team Meeting.

Inclusion of the CASA in Family Team Meetings

CASA's are a valuable asset that should be added to the family team. The CASA serves as the advocate for the child and can provide valuable support for the family in court. If allowed to participate, the CASA can gain first hand knowledge of the work being done by the family and hear the family voice the knowledge

and wisdom gained from participating in services. Membership in the team will allow the CASA to feel added confidence in supporting the team's recommendations to the court regarding permanency for the child.

Preparation Interview

Successful Family Team Meetings require careful preparation of the family regarding the purpose, roles and outcome. An important goal of the preparation interview is to engage and empower families in the shared planning and decision making process. Prior to the FTM the Facilitator/Designee should conduct the preparation interview and ensure the following:

1. The interview is conducted in the family's home whenever possible or other location that is comfortable for the family.
2. Families are encouraged to identify formal and informal supports that they would like to attend the meeting.
3. Families are provided with the FTM Brochure and be informed of the specific stages/format of the FTM.
4. Discuss HIPAA and other confidentiality stipulations.
5. Explain legal issues and non-negotiables
6. Discuss potential conflicts or safety issues and plans to resolve/prevent them.
7. Discuss the role of the participants.
8. Provide opportunity for family to ask questions or address concerns with the process.
9. Discuss if any special accommodations are necessary
10. Find out if interpreter services are needed.
11. Discuss access and availability (place, date and time) for the FTM. Also consider arranging around school schedules for children that can participate, to minimize school absences.
12. Provide family with written and verbal information on the date, time and place of the FTM.
13. Discuss childcare and transportation issues.

All other participants should be contacted and be provided with information regarding the FTM and an orientation of their role and the FTM process.

Domestic Violence Cases

A primary concern for family team meetings in which issues of domestic violence are identified is the safety of the family team. Cases involving domestic violence can be very complicated and must be treated with the appropriate care. The best source of information for what needs to be addressed is the family themselves. A safety and risk assessment must be completed prior to the family team meeting. It is important to discuss and assess whether conflict is likely and/or if there is an existing Order of Protection and potential violation of the provisions, should all the invited participants attend one conference. Additionally, discuss with the survivor/victim of domestic violence, what they believe will ensure the safety of herself/himself and the children. Discussion can be done during the preparation interview if it can be done safely and as appropriate. It may be necessary to schedule two separate FTMs, assessing whether they should be held on the

same day. It is also recommended that a community partner with expertise in domestic violence or a domestic violence liaison is engaged for assistance. A co-facilitator, with some specialized knowledge and skills may also be involved in the meeting. (See reference link)

REFERENCES

Standards of Practice for DFCS Family Team Meetings:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/FTM%20Standards%20of%20Practice.doc

DFCS FTM Preparation Interview Worksheet:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/FTM%20Preparation%20Interview%20CFSR%20Worksheet.doc

FTM HIPAA Release Form:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/FTM%20Confidentiality%20Agreement.doc

FTM Brochure:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-edu/FTM/FTM_brochure%20English.doc

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/FTM%20brochure%20Spanish.doc

Social Services County Letter No: 08-01:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/CASA.pdf

Family Team Conferences in Domestic Violence Cases: Guidelines for Practice:

http://www.dhs.state.ia/dhs2005/cppc/docs/FTC_Guidelines4Practice.pdf

Other Resources:

http://dhr.state.ga.us/DHR-DFCS/DHR_DFCS-Edu/FTM/FTM%20Facilitators%20Assessment%20Pocket%20Guide.doc

http://www.childwelfaregroup.org/documents/FTC_History.pdf

SHINES SCREEN SHOTS

Team Meetings/Reviews - Windows Internet Explorer

https://uatshines.dhs.state.ga.us/subcore/PPT/displayPPT

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Team Meetings/Reviews

SHINES UAT Log Off ? IDS GHP

My Tasks Case Search Intake Financial Reports Resources

Case Summary Person Contacts/Summaries Service Authorization Legal Family Plans Custody Case Management

Foster Care Case Plan Family Team Meetings/Reviews Services and Referrals Checklist

Stage Name: Adams Sherry L
Stage ID: 11205253

Team Meetings/Reviews

Meeting Information

* Meeting Type: FTM
* Meeting Date: 02/20/2009
Start Time: 03:00 PM

FTM Meeting Information

☒ Previous Requirements/Recommendations Met Preparation Interview

Location

Number: (770) 555-4433 Extension: 15
Street:
City: State: Georgia
Zip: County:

Team Meetings/Reviews - Windows Internet Explorer

https://uatshines.dhs.state.ga.us/subcore/PPT/displayPPTParticipant

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Team Meetings/Reviews

☒ Previous Requirements/Recommendations Met Preparation Interview

Location

Number: (770) 555-4433 Extension: 15
Street:
City: State: Georgia
Zip: County:

Comments

Cherokee County DFCS office, Conference Room

Comments Validate

Participation

Name	Notified	Notification Type	Participated	Relationship/Interest
<input type="radio"/> Rhonda Yelands			02/20/2009	DFCS Staff

Delete Add

Save and Submit Save

Narrative